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ABSTRACT

The role of summer session attendance in time-to-degree was studied in a two-phase investigation. In the first phase, a survey was used to collect data from 10 universities on the entering class of 1992 who took a degree in arts and sciences. This cohort was followed to graduation periods of less than 4 years, 4 years, 5, years, 6 years, and more than 6 years. Survey items addressed time to complete bachelor's degree, gender, Scholastic Assessment Test scores, and grade point averages at the time of graduation. In the second phase of the study, telephone interviews were conducted with 33 students at the University of Virginia who graduated in less than 4 years. Findings from both phases show the important role summer session plays in providing opportunities for college students to complete their bachelor's degrees in 4 years. Summer session also plays an essential role in supporting students who wish to graduate in less than 4 years. Attending summer session did not deter academic achievement, and attendance in summer sessions had no gender preference. Financial pressures and the need to save money motivated students who completed their degrees in less than 4 years. The longer the time required for students to complete degrees, the more work and financial aid was needed to cover their expenses. The paper discusses the implications of reducing the time required to complete a degree program. (Contains 21 references.) (SLD)

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ATTENDING SUMMER SESSION AND TIME TO THE DEGREE

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ATTENDING SUMMER SESSION AND TIME TO THE DEGREE

Introduction

The proportion of college students who earned their bachelor's degree in four years has declined. According to a survey conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), the percentage of students who completed their bachelor's degree in four years dropped from 45.4 percent in 1977, to 31.1 percent in 1990 (1993). During the same period of time, the proportion of students taking more than six years to complete their degree increased (NCES). In a later study, the Illinois State Board of Higher Education found that only 26 percent of students who entered college between 1987 and 1992 earned their degree in four years while 22 percent took five years, and 8 percent took six years (1999). Public university graduates were found to enroll in 12 terms on average (Illinois State Board of Education). The high number of students taking five years or longer to graduate has resulted in the reporting of five- and six-year graduation rates rather than four-year rates in college guidebooks and national education data bases (Volkwein & Lorang, 1996).

Problem

The financial implications of extending the time to complete the bachelor's degree are of concern. Longer average time-to-degree extends the financial burden on students, the parents of dependent students, institutions, and states. How to counter the trend toward a longer average time-to-degree is an important question to consider in an era of rising costs and increased competition for scarce public resources. Summer session as a vehicle for reducing the time to the bachelor's degree holds intuitive appeal. Study options are increased. Additionally, offering courses beyond the traditional academic year

can presumably more effectively leverage existing resources and facilities. Yet while it may seem logical to assume that summer session attendance expedites degree completion, little, if any, research has addressed either summer session attendance and time-to-degree or the students who actually take their bachelor's degree in under four years.

The Study

In order to develop understanding of the role of summer session and time-to-degree, the investigators designed a sequential mixed-methods study conducted in two phases. The study was both exploratory and descriptive. In phase one, the investigators employed an email survey to collect data on summer session attendance at ten research universities where summer session is a central part of academic programming.

Both public and private institutions participated in phase one. Each of the institutions offers bachelor degrees in arts, sciences, and letters. The investigators used the survey to collect data from the institutions on the entering class of 1992 who took a degree in arts and sciences. This cohort was followed through to graduation periods of less than 4 years, 4 years, 5 years, 6 years, and more than 6 years. Survey items addressed time to complete the bachelor's degree, gender, SAT scores, and GPAs at the time of graduation.

The University of Virginia, a public research university, which promotes early degree completion in its College of Arts and Sciences through summer session attendance, served as the site for, phase two of the study. Interestingly, little was known about the numbers of students who took advantage of the accelerated graduation option, the characteristics of the students, and the nature of their experiences despite the official

policy in support of early degree completion. Phase two of the study is a study of these early graduates who completed their bachelor's degree in less than four years.

The 1992 cohort of first-time, first-year students who took their bachelor's degree from the University of Virginia's College of Arts and Sciences in under four years served as the population for phase two of the study. The investigators developed a telephone survey instrument, which the university's survey research center used to interview 33 respondents from a population of 115 students who graduated in less than four years. Supply items, which collected qualitative data, comprised the majority of the items in the instrument. The constructs of the instrument included student characteristics, motivations to graduate early, approaches used to graduate early, and student experiences/levels of satisfaction.

Purpose

The overall purpose of the two-phase study was to improve understanding of the role of summer session in students' progress toward completion of the bachelor's degree. To accomplish this, the investigators sought a) to identify characteristics of students who attend summer session after using time-to-degree as a sorting criterion and b) to amass information on the experiences and perceptions of individuals at one institution who took their degree early and attended summer session at their home institution.

Research Questions

Phase 1

1. What descriptions exist between time-to-degree and summer session attendance? Years to complete the bachelor's degree, gender of graduates, SAT scores of graduates and GPAs at time of graduation?

Phase 2

1. Are there significant reasons for deciding to graduate early different between students who attended summer session at the University of Virginia and those who didn't? Financial concerns, academic features, and educational experiences are examined.

2. What are some positive and negative experiences of students for accelerating their bachelor's degree program?

Review of Literature

This study examines the recent trends in time-to-degree and some important factors that contribute to the length of time needed to earn a bachelor's degree. Several strategies are discussed for schools to use in order to aid students in reducing the time needed to attain a bachelor's degree and thus reduce the financial burden for all parties.

Background

Several studies have looked at the increasing length of time that students are using to earn bachelor's degrees. According to a survey conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics, the percentage of students who were able to complete their bachelor's degrees in four years dropped from 45.4 percent in 1977 to 31.1 percent in 1990. This survey also suggests that while the percentage of students completing their degrees in four years declined, the percentage of students completing their degrees in more than six years increased during the same time period (1993). A more recent study by the Illinois State Board of Higher Education found that of the students who entered college between 1987 and 1992, 26 percent graduated in four years, 48 percent graduated after five years, and 56 percent graduated by the end of six years. Furthermore, public university graduates enrolled in an average of 12 terms before receiving their bachelor's degrees (1999). Clearly, there is a rising tendency for students to take more than the

normally accepted amount of four years to graduate and receive degrees. In fact, due to the high number of undergraduate students taking five or six years to graduate, the majority of college guidebooks and national education databases are reporting five- and six-year graduation rates instead of the old four-year standard (Volkwein & Lorang, 1996).

These changes in the overall trend in time-to-degree leave schools, administrators, students, parents, and the tax-paying public asking the questions: what is causing these changes, and why do students need more time than ever in order to complete their degrees? In the following sections, possible answers to these questions are offered and discussed.

Factors Contributing to Time-to-Degree

There is greater diversity in the knowledge, experience, background, and skills of college students today than ever before (Levine, 1994). Some students come to college with the abilities and experiences that enable them to finish their studies in fewer than four years. Others may need six or more years to finish college. Still others may not complete their degrees at all and search for opportunities in other areas. A number of factors contribute to these differences in the heterogeneous group of today's college students is a number of factors. Academic ability, gender, race, type of academic institution, financial aid, part- or full-time work, and involvement with intercollegiate athletics are but some of the many factors that have been identified as contributing to the time that is needed by college students to earn a bachelor's degree (Knight, 1994). Characteristics of students who are able to complete their degree requirements in each of the aforementioned time intervals are be discussed and considered below.

Four Years to Degree

Although the normal, accepted period of time to attain a bachelor's degree is four years, fewer students are now able to earn degrees in this time period. As mentioned before, only 26 percent of undergraduate students in public universities complete their bachelor's degree requirements within four years (Illinois State Board of Higher Education, 1999).

While the number of students who are able to complete their studies in four years is declining, several common personal characteristics within this group of graduates shed light on interesting factors related to time-to-degree issue. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, more women than men, more white students than black students, and more students studying at private colleges those studying at public colleges are able to complete their degree programs within four years (1993). Cuccaro-Alamin's findings show that 53 percent of students at private colleges are able to graduate within four years while only 28 percent are able to graduate within the same timeframe from public colleges (1997). Out-of-state students are also more likely to finish their degree requirements within four years compared to in-state students (Lam, 1999). This is probably due to the high cost of tuition and the students' desire to finish quickly in order to cut financial burdens to themselves or their parents.

In addition to the personal traits that are common among students who graduate after four years there are a number of similar academic decisions made by members of this group. Students who choose to start college immediately after finishing high school are more likely to earn their degree within four years than all students who choose to delay enrollment, even if the delay is only one year (Cuccaro-Alamin, 1997).

Furthermore, students who have earned advanced placement credit in high school are much more likely to graduate within four years (Volkwein & Lorang, 1996). Financial aid also contributes to a student's ability to finish degree requirements within four years. Students who receive financial aid, and therefore do not work to subsidize their educational costs, are able to focus on their studies rather than money concerns. Students who are given this opportunity are more likely to earn their degrees within four years (Perkins, Pitter, Howat, & Whitfield, 1999). A student's financial aid may also allow him to attend classes year round, speeding progression toward completion of the degree (Lam, 1999). Lastly, Knight also cites living in a residence hall and enrolling in orientation courses to be common decisions made by students who are able to complete their degrees within four years (1994).

Five Years to Degree

It has been shown that 48 percent of college students are able to earn their bachelor's degrees within five years (Illinois State Board of Higher Education, 1999). While these students, sometimes referred to as extenders, share common characteristics with non-extenders, or those finishing in four years, there are some important attributes common to extenders that should be considered.

According to Volkwein and Lorang, "the most apparent reason for students to take longer than four years to graduate was that they attempted fewer than 15 credits a semester" (1996, p. 52). Possible reasons for students to take fewer than 15 credits include course availability, personal problems, finances, work, and a desire to have a light course load. Although it is surprising, Volkwein and Lorang also report that extenders typically earn more summer session credits than non-extenders (1996).

Many students who work while enrolled in classes need five years to complete their degree requirements. Due to inadequate financial aid more students work in order to pay for the high costs of tuition and personal expenses. Heavy involvement in work can, however, delay graduation by at least one semester. These working students are also usually working during the summer months and are therefore not able to attend summer courses in an attempt to get ahead (Lam, 1999).

Students who transfer from 2-year institutions or community colleges usually require a total of five years to complete their degrees. According to the Illinois State Board of Higher Education, community college students who transfer after two years of study usually require an additional five terms, or two and a half years to complete their degrees (1999). Glass and Bunn add that 62 percent of community college students who transfer to senior institutions graduate within three years of transferring (1998). It is believed that these transfer students take longer than the regular four-year time interval to complete their degrees due to a loss of credits when they transfer. Students who transfer from community colleges also have difficulty paying for college, and may have to balance school with part-time work (Glass & Bunn, 1999).

Also included in this group of extenders are those students who need remedial coursework. This group includes a high proportion of black students. Levine reports that, "42 percent of black [college students] currently enroll in basic skills and developmental courses in reading, writing, and mathematics" (1994). When students are involved in courses such as these the time-to-degree is customarily lengthened to more than four years.

Six Years to Degree (and more)

The number of college students needing six years to complete their bachelor's degrees increased from 24.7 percent in 1977 to 30.1 percent in 1993 (Woodhams, 1998). Research suggests that some students may be more likely to need six years to finish their degrees due to personal, financial, and athletic reasons.

The high costs of tuition, books, and living expenses force some students to work while they continue their studies. While some students are able to meet their needs through part-time work, others need to work full-time. Compared to students who work part-time, it is much less likely that full-time working students will have completed their degrees by the end of their fifth year. Many of these students are still enrolled in their sixth year (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998). Furthermore, students who attend school on a part-time basis, perhaps due to full-time work requirements, are much more likely to need at least six years to complete their degree requirements (Cuccaro-Alamin, 1997). Students who delay their entry to college by at least one year are also more likely to need more time in order to complete their degrees. According to Curraco-Alamin, these students are almost three times more likely to take six or more years to graduate than students who do not delay entrance (1997).

Many college athletes require six years to graduate. Lederman reports that 48 percent of male athletes and 58 percent of female athletes graduate within six years. Furthermore, 59 percent of white athletes and 36 percent of black athletes complete their degrees within six years (1993). Lederman does not, however, comment on the percentage of athletes who do not complete their degrees at all. But the numbers he does

present clearly show that many college athletes take up to six years to complete their degree requirements.

Program choice also seems to be a factor among students who take at least six years to graduate. According to the study by the Illinois State Board of Higher Education, "students who require more than six years to complete their baccalaureate degrees [are] more likely to have changed academic programs at either the community college or the university level or both" (1999). Thus, students who change majors may find themselves having to take extra time in earning their bachelor's degrees. There is also a relationship between a longer time-to-degree and individual academic program. Engineering students appear to take the longest time to graduate, with 16.3 percent of engineering students still enrolled after five years (Kroc, Howard, Hull, & Woodard, 1997).

Students with learning disabilities also tend to take longer to complete their degrees than students who do not have learning disabilities. Vogel and Adelman suggest that many students with learning disabilities take up to six years to graduate because they often find in necessary to take significantly lighter loads than their non-learning disabled peers (1992).

It should also be noted that black and Hispanic students often need at least six years to complete their bachelor's degrees. The Illinois study reports that, "at the end of six years, 29 percent of black and 39 percent of Hispanic [students] had completed their baccalaureate degrees" (1999, p.11). The graduation rates for these students improved beyond six years with 38 percent of black students and 48 percent of Hispanic students graduating within seven to ten years (Illinois State Board of Higher Education, 1999).

There are, of course, some students who never complete their degree. Students may leave college without a degree in order to pursue other interests or professional endeavors. Some students may feel that they have completed their educational objectives before obtaining a degree. There are many options for students now beyond staying in school and some students choose those other options.

Strategies for Reducing Time-to-Degree

In reaction to the current trend toward a lengthening of time-to-degree, schools and states have started looking into ways to help students earn their bachelor's degrees within four years. By shortening time-to-degree, students, parents, states, and schools would benefit financially. With this purpose in mind, Washington State University has started a four-year-guarantee program. Other schools, including the University of Missouri at Columbia and the University of Maine at Orono have adopted similar programs in order to reduce the costs to all parties (Woodhams, 1998).

In 1996, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board published *Ten Strategies and Their Financial Implications for Reducing Time-to-Degree in Texas Universities*. While some of the strategies they suggest are specific to Texas universities, several of the strategies serve as good starting points for schools that are concerned about longer times-to degree. These strategies include:

- Requiring universities to guarantee time-to-degree, including a guarantee that students will be able to register for required courses, and will not be closed out of them;
- Encouraging students to earn college credits while they are in high school;
- using technology/distance education;
- increasing summer school opportunities; and
- providing financial awards for students who graduate in three years (1996, p. 6-12).

Of course, not all students will be able to complete degree requirements within four years, no matter what new programs colleges and universities may offer. But some of the above strategies could be helpful for those students who could and would like to finish their degrees within four years.

In addition to the strategies listed above, institutions would do students a great service by scheduling courses to meet student needs, monitoring and advising students on academic affairs, improving the transferability of courses, and offering adequate levels of financial aid (Schoenberg, 1994; Illinois State Board of Higher Education, 1999; Perkins, et al., 1999). There are many issues involved in this time-to-degree topic, but institutions can help students attain their degree within four years by focusing both on student need, and on ways in which institutions can help in meeting their students' needs.

Summary Comments

College students are taking longer than ever before to complete their bachelor's degrees. Less than a third of students today are graduating within four years (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993). Contributing to this lengthening in time to attain degrees are numerous factors, including finances, work, race, gender, delayed entry, and athletic involvement. As the number of years that are needed to graduate increases, the costs to students, parents, schools, and state also increases. As more is learned about factors that contribute to a longer time-to-degree, institutions will should be able to address new ideas and programs to combat this new trend and therefore lessen the financial burden to schools and their students.

Methodology

Phase 1

The entering class of 1992 was selected for study due to the availability of complete data on the cohort. The researchers studied the length of time taken to obtain a bachelor's degree in relation to whether or not students attended summer session. Selected private and public research universities were invited to participate. Each of the institutions offers bachelor degrees in arts, sciences, and letters. Summer session is a central part of education programming at each of these universities. The entering class of 1992 was selected as the group to follow through to graduation in periods of less than four years, four years, five years, six years, and more than six years.

George Stovall, the Director of the Office of Institutional Assessment and Studies at the University of Virginia, serves as a data manager for the Association of American University Data Exchange and is consequently well-informed about the types of data that are shared and knows institutional researchers at a number of universities. He assisted the investigators with the identification of variables, the design of the instrument, the plan for administration of the study, and the selection of participants.

Sample

Initially, the investigators selected a broad range of five public and five private research universities to participate in the study. Some of these institutions were unable to provide the information, and consequently, other institutions were solicited until 10 were obtained (seven publicly controlled and three privately controlled). Summer session is an important part of education programming at each of the institutions selected, and each awards bachelor's degrees in arts and sciences.

Instrumentation

The research team elected to collect the needed data through a survey directed to the institutional research offices at the institutions selected for the sample. To facilitate ease of completion and to increase the response rate, the team chose to administer the survey via email. The survey was forwarded to the sample in September 2000. Seven institutions responded by October 31, 2000. Responses from the remaining three institutions in the survey came in by the end of 2000.

Validity

"Expert" input from the staff of the University of Virginia's Office of Institutional Assessment and Studies and colleagues in institutional research on both the constructs and items in the survey and on procedures served as sources of validity. The literature reviewed for the study also provided a source of content validity.

The survey collected a variety of data types: nominal, interval, and ratio. The investigators used descriptive statistics in their analysis of the data. They discussed these data from the first phase of the study along with the concomitant analysis of the data at the National Association of Summer Session (NASS) conference in November 2001 in Memphis, TN.

In phase 1 of the study, the researchers found that existing policy encouraged early degree completion. This peaked their interest both in students who completed their bachelor's degree in less than four years and in the implementation of policy related to early degree completion. Phase 2 of the study resulted from this interest.

Phase 2

The University of Virginia's Office of Institutional Assessment and Studies provided data on first time first year students in the 1992 cohort. Of the 1887 students in the cohort of 1992 who earned a degree from the College of Arts and Sciences, 115, or 6%, finished in less than four years. Sixty-five percent of those students (75) did not attend any summer term at UVa while 35% (40) attended at least one summer session at UVa. Among the entire 1992 cohort, 60% (1,125) did not attend any summer terms while 40% (762) attended at least one summer term. Rates of participation in UVa's summer session varied only slightly among the two groups, the entire cohort and those who finished in less than four years. This small difference is, however, quite interesting because intuitively one might have expected the group of individuals who finished early to have had higher rates of participation in UVa's summer session.

Sample

The investigators contacted the University of Virginia's alumni association and development offices and collected telephone numbers for each member of the population for whom the alumni or development office had a number on record. Of the 115 students in the population, 33 were successfully contacted and completed the telephone survey.

Instrumentation

The investigators elected to employ a telephone survey because many of the variables required participants to supply an answer, i.e., provide qualitative data. A telephone survey can be used to gather significant amounts of data efficiently. The research team engaged University of Virginia's Center for Survey Research (CSR) to

conduct the telephone survey. Work completed on phase 1 of the study as well as the literature on time-to-degree informed the design of the telephone survey.

Validity

The investigators solicited "expert" input from the staff of the survey research office and UVa's Office of Institutional Assessment and Studies on both the constructs and items of the survey and on procedures. The literature reviewed for the study also provided a source of content validity. The survey research office also conducted a pilot study, which resulted in a revised instrument.

Data analysis

The majority of survey items collected nominal data. Among these items were a number selection items for which descriptive statistics were calculated. The investigators conducted content analysis on the supply items. Descriptive statistics were also derived from the ordinal data collected by several items.

Chi-square tests for significant differences (at or below the 0.10 level) were conducted on selected variables between the group who attended summer session at the University of Virginia and those who did not.

Findings

Phase 1

There were 10 research universities, which reported information in Phase 1 of this study. Of these, seven were publicly and three were privately controlled. Eleven thousand, seven hundred and forty-five students entered these institutions in the fall of 1992 and enrolled in arts, sciences or letters.

Of the 11,745 students in the 1992 entering classes, 5% graduated in less than

four years, 64% graduated in four years, 25% graduated in five years, four percent graduated in six years, and two percent graduated in more than six years.

TABLE 1

Time to Degree of the Entering Class of 1992 and Attending Summer Session

Number of Summer Sessions Attended	Years to Graduation					
	Less than four	Four	Five	Six	More than Six	Total
None	209	3,631	811	106	45	4802(41%)
One session	177	2,270	883	144	75	3549(30%)
More than one session	182	1,596	1,203	265	148	3,394(29%)
Total	568 (5%)	7,497 (64%)	2,897 (25%)	515 (4%)	268 (2%)	11,745

N=10 universities

Over 40% of these graduates never attended summer session at their home institution during their undergraduate college careers while 59% did attend summer session at their home institution. Two hundred and nine students graduated in less than four years and did not attend summer session at their home institution. Sixty-four percent of the graduates received their bachelor's degree in four years. About half of these students (52%) attended summer session at their home institution. Four percent took six years to graduate and two percent took more than six years. In these groups, 79% and 83%, respectively, attended summer session at their home institution.

About equal percentages of men and women did not attend summer session at their home institution while pursuing a bachelor's degree. The percentages of students

are distributed below by gender and number of summer sessions attended while completing their bachelor's degree.

Gender	Number of Summer Sessions Attended		
	None	One	More than One
Male	40.0%	29.7%	30.3%
Female	41.1	29.7	29.2

N=10 institutions

The average mean SAT scores of the entering class of 1992 decreased by number of summer sessions attended. The average mean SAT for graduates who did not attend any summer sessions at their home institution was 1,204; for those who attended one, the average mean SAT was 1,172. It decreased to 1,132 for those who attended more than one summer session.

The average mean GPA also declined as the number of summer sessions attended increased. For graduates who attended no summer sessions at their home institutions, the average mean GPA was 3.3; for those attending one summer session, the average mean GPA was 3.2; and the average mean GPA decreased to 3.0 for those attending more than one summer session at their home institution.

In summary, over half of the entering class of 1992 in the 10 research universities surveyed in this study attended summer session while completing their bachelor's degree. Equal percentages of men and women attended summer session. The average mean SAT scores and GPAs decreased as the number of summer sessions attended at their home institutions increased.

Phase 2

In Phase 2 of the study, the investigators decided to examine the entering class of 1992 in the College of Arts and Sciences at University of Virginia more closely. A policy for accelerating completion of the bachelor's degree in less than four years exists, and 115 members (6%) of the entering class of 1992 were identified to be early completers. In this phase, reasons for choosing to graduate early, time of the early decision, academic effects, participation in school activities, and benefits of graduating early were considered. A telephone survey was used to gather information for Phase II. Of the 115 early graduates, 33 (29%) were successfully contacted and interviewed by telephone.

Reasons for Deciding to Graduate Early.

The reasons given for deciding to graduate early were as follow.

	Degree of Importance			
Reasons	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not at all Important	Total
Financial Pressures/ Need to save money	15	8	10	33
Family Circumstances/ Parents, siblings	7	1	23	31
Family Circumstances/ Spouse, children	2	0	23	25
Eager to get job and get into real world	11	12	10	33
Tired of school	10	10	13	33
Ready to go to Graduate school	12	9	11	32
Special opportunity for work or school	5	7	21	33

The respondents were then asked to rank the reasons by order of importance. The responses were rank ordered by importance in deciding to graduate early as follows.

1. Financial pressures or needing to save money
2. Eager to get a job and get into the real world
3. Tired of school
4. Ready to go to graduate school

The early graduates agreed that financial pressures and the need to save money were the most important reasons in deciding to graduate early. Concerns of parents and family were not important considerations in deciding to graduate early.

Most of the early graduates (71.8%) reported that they planned to graduate early when they entered their first year at the University. But when asked when they first thought of definitely graduating early, only 42% of the respondents noted that they first thought about graduating early in the fall semester of their third year. Most of the respondents, however, couldn't recall when they made the final decision to formalize their graduation date.

The respondents were asked who was involved in the discussion to graduate early. Nearly three-fourths (73%) of the responses identified their parents were the main persons sought out for advice. Faculty member or major adviser was noted by 21% of the early graduate respondents as important sources for advice to graduate early. Faculty was important but less than the influence of the student's parents. Parents and faculty member or major adviser were also noted as having the most important influence on the actual time of the decision to graduate early by the respondents.

Academic Features of Early Graduation

The early graduate respondents reported their majors to include biology, foreign affairs, rhetoric and communication, mathematics, physics, psychology, economics, biochemistry, government, religious studies, English, chemistry, and Asian studies. A number of respondents (24%) reported having a double major. The selection of a major by the respondents was reported by most (64%) to have no affect on their decision to graduate early or on the decision to pursue a second major. Most of the respondents (73%) did not change their major decision once selected; however, 27% reported changing their major in the shortened time period in completing the bachelor's degree.

Slightly over one-third (39%) of the respondents reported that they compromised their academic goals in order to finish in less than four years. Of the respondents who related that they comprised their academic goals, nine judged the change to by "somewhat" and four rated the change as "very much".

Nearly all of the respondents (93%) reported that they were able to take all the courses needed toward their major field of study, and 79% were able to get the electives needed to graduate early, including summer session course selections.

Frequent visitation in the homes of faculty was reported by 33% of the respondents. Over half (52%) of the respondents reported frequent visits with faculty in their offices, too.

Summer Session

Over one-half (52%, 17) of the respondents reported to have attended summer session at the University of Virginia while completing their bachelor's degree in less than

four years. The remainder (48%, 16) attended summer session at other colleges and universities.

Of the 17 early graduates who attended summer session at the University of Virginia, 12 attended only one session and five who attended two or more times. The respondents most frequently enrolled in one course (9) but two respondents enrolled in more than three courses in the University of Virginia's summer session.

The reasons which influenced the early graduate respondents to enroll in summer classes are listed below.

Influences on summer course selection	Frequency	Percent
Course not available during the academic year	17	100
Course was a requirement For major	7	41
Time of day course was offered	4	24
Interested in course	13	76

All of the respondents reported selecting summer course because the course was not available during the academic year. Other reasons for selecting summer courses included requirement for major, time of day course was offered and interest in the course.

Over one-half of the 17 respondents (59%) who attended summer session at the University of Virginia reported that their decision to graduate early influenced their decision to enroll in summer session. Also, 71% reported that once enrolled in summer session they were influenced to graduate in less than four years.

There were 16 (48%) of the 33 respondents who reported that they had enrolled in summer session at another institution than the University of Virginia. The 16 respondents who enrolled in courses at other institutions reported to be influenced to graduate early by attending summer session. The same is true of the 17 respondents who attended summer session at the University of Virginia. Therefore, all respondents who graduated early attended summer session in completing their degree requirements in less than four years.

Extracurricular Activities

Most (85%) of the early graduate respondents reported being involved in some extracurricular activity while at the University of Virginia. The respondent participation is listed by organization.

Organization	Frequency
Sorority/Fraternity	11
Service Fraternity	6
Publicity/Radio	5
Musical Groups	3
Religious Groups	2
Student Government	1
Drama	1
Student Professional Organizations	7
Intercollegiate Sports	12 (two were on full scholarships)

Most of the respondents (70%) reported that their decision to graduate early did not affect their participation in extracurricular activities. But, 30% of the respondents reported that their decision to graduate early had "somewhat" to "very much" effect on their extra-curricular activities.

Over one-half of the respondents (52%) reported that they were employed while taking classes, two were employed full-time, and four were employed in the work-study program. The percent of expenses covered by working are as follows.

Percent of Expenses Covered	Frequency
2%	1
5	4
10	9
13	2
55	1
100	2

The percent of expenses covered from respondents' employment mostly ranged from two percent to 55%, but 100% by two respondents who graduated in less than four years.

Over three-fourths (76%) of the respondents reported that they had a car while completing their degree in less than four years.

Over one-half (52%) of the respondents reported that they had received financial aid while enrolled at the University of Virginia.

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents reported that they were Virginia residents while enrolled in the University of Virginia and paid in-state tuition.

Satisfaction with Educational Experience in Accelerated Approach

The 33 respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the educational experiences associated with reduced time to the degree. Their replies are as follows

	Degree of Satisfaction			
Educational Experience	Very satisfied (1)	somewhat (2)	neutral (3)	somewhat dissatisfied (4)
Classrooms	24	--	--	9
Availability of Courses	20	--	--	13
Out of class experiences	22	9	2	--
Course work in summer	11	6	16	--
Faculty Advising	8	15	5	5
NonClass Faculty Contact	12	9	10	2

The respondents were satisfied with their educational experiences in and out of the classrooms, with the availability of courses, course work in the summer session, faculty advising and non-class faculty contact.

Among those who attended the University of Virginia's summer session, the respondents also were satisfied with the summer session overall; 14 (82%) were very satisfied and 3 (18%) were somewhat satisfied.

Nearly three-fourths (76%) of the respondents were very satisfied with their major and with the University of Virginia experience.

The early degree graduates were solicited for their opinions regarding the early degree graduation approach to the bachelor's degree. Two-thirds (67%) were very

satisfied with the way the accelerated approach is being administered at the University and one respondenf was very dissatisfied. One-third of the respondents (30%) were also very satisfied with the information made available concerning the accelerated approach to the bachelor's degree; eight were dissatisfied with the adequacy of information about the program.

Most (85%) of the respondents reported that they would repeat their decision to graduate early if they had to make the decision over again. Some of the benefits gained from reducing the time to the degree include: provides the opportunity to do other things, increased work experience, social, didn't interfere with going to graduate school, entered job market early, provided a little time to relax before entering medical school, saved money and got a head start in a career. Some benefits the respondents reported they missed included more social activities, little time for experimentation; selection of wide range of electives was reduced and missing friends.

Demographics

In closing the interviews, the respondents were ask to provide selected features of their present situation. These comments indicated that of the 33 interviewees, four are in a graduate or professional school; seven have earned M.A. degrees; four M.D.s; four Ph.D./Ed.D degree recipients; three J.D.s and three other degrees.

Some of the present occupations of the respondents included medical resident, law school student, banking associate, pharmacist, consultant, neurologist, corporate attorney, engineering student, graduate student, and business development/marketing

About one-half (16 or 48%) of the interviewees were married; two were widowed; and 16 have never married.

Most of the respondents (22, 67%) were born in 1974 (27 years of age). There were 18 females and 15 males in the group. Two-thirds of the respondents described themselves as white; four as African-Americans; two as Asians and one as other ethnic group.

Chi-Square Analysis

A chi-square analysis was performed between the group of early graduate respondents who attended summer session at the University of Virginia and the group of respondents who reported that they did not attend summer session at the University of Virginia. A 0.10 level of significance was set to acknowledge differences between the two groups on selected variables. An examination of the chi-square computations of differences between the two groups on variables defining reasons for deciding to graduate early: who was involved in the decision; when the decision was made; academic issues associated with the decision to graduate early such as major field of study; and faculty advising; and features of summer session which included courses taken, satisfaction with the educational experience, and participation in extracurricular activities. From this examination, the following significant differences between the groups attending and not attending summer session at the University of Virginia are as follows.

Chi Square Anaylsis of Reasons to Graduate In Less Than Four Years, Entering Class of 1992, College of Arts and Sciences

Variable	Value	df	P (2-sided)
Reason to Graduate Early:			
Financial Pressures/Need to Save Money	10.046**	2	.007
Eager to Get a Job and get into the Real World	6.163*	2	.046

Ready for Graduate School	5.685	2	.058
Most Important Reasons— Save money, eager to get a job, tired of school and ready to graduate	8.646*	3	.034
Discuss Decision with— Parents	3.417	1	.065
NON-UVA Credits taken abroad	3.694	1	.055
Early graduate plans Influence Non-Uva Courses taken	3.306	1	.069
Employed while taking Classes	5.125*	1	.024
Employed under Work Study Program	4.421*	1	.035
Received loans or Financial aid	8.742**	1	.003
Residency status	3.882*	1	.049
Satisfaction with Faculty advising	7.343	3	.062
Satisfied with Non-class Contact with faculty	7.783	3	.051
Attending graduate or Professional school	6.919*	2	.031
Earned MA degree	2.739	1	.098
Earned Ph.D./Ed.D degree	6.830**	1	.009
Year born	6.667	3	.083

**=P≤ .01 *= P≤ .05

Significant differences were found between the groups of respondents who attended summer session at the University of Virginia and those who did not attend. The variables associated with financial adequacy were most prominent. These included the main reason to shorten the time to the degree included getting a job and saving money, parental influence on deciding to graduate early, employment while in school, and residency status. Education plans also were significant and included getting ready for graduate school and obtaining an advanced or professional degree. There were differences between the groups concerning some educational concerns which were related to faculty contact and study abroad. There was also a significant difference found between the groups in the year of birth of the respondents.

Discussion

Findings of this study indicate the important role summer session plays in providing opportunities for college students to complete their bachelor degrees in a normal time of four years. Also, summer session plays an essential role in supporting those students who desire to graduate in less than four years. Attending summer session does not deter academic achievement and attendance has no gender preference. Prior studies showed that more men than women graduate in four years, but this study show no differences in gender.

Financial pressures and the need to save money motivate graduates who complete their degrees in less than four years. Prior reports (Lam, 1999, Volkwein and Lorang, 1996)) showed that students taking four or more years to graduate usually has financial assistance. The longer the time required for students to complete their degrees, the more work and financial aid was needed to cover expenses. Early graduates in less than four

years also were shown to receive financial support and work, but not in the same degree as those graduating in four or more years. Financial concerns of early graduates have implications for institutional policy. Should students be pressured to graduate early because of financial concerns?

Students couldn't remember exactly when they began to think of or decide exactly when they were going to complete their degree in less than four years. They were cognizant of discussing the early option with their parents more than another other source of advice. Institutional information was made available in an effective manner to the early graduates. There is a need for admissions officials and academic advisers to become better informed and helpful in disseminating information regarding the accelerated graduation policies of their institutions.

Major fields of study were mixed by the early graduates and had little influence on those who desired a double major. The variety of majors of the early graduates also indicates the curriculum integrity of the early degree option.

High levels of participation in extracurricular activities by the early graduates were not affected by the decision to reduce the time for degree completion. The accelerated programs of study did not compromise participation in extracurricular activities. Interesting enough, in addition to intense study demands and participation in extracurricular activities, many of the early graduates were required to work in order to continue in their studies.

The benefits of shortening the time to the degree provided opportunities to enter graduate and professional school early, enter a career process early, reduce expenses for a college education, and save money. Conversely, early graduation restricted opportunities

for more social involvements, a broader selection of elective courses and time for experimentation, and time to increase friendships.

The early degree graduates were satisfied with their educational experiences and the manner summer session provided an opportunity to complete their course work. Pascarella & Terenzini (1991) describe college students' satisfaction with the undergraduate experience and support some of the findings of student satisfaction with courses, faculty and overall life in this study.

Reduced time to the degree is an important activity to be addressed as a way to reduce costs for completing a bachelor's degree. More students can be served by making spaces available as students graduate early. Public policy considerations for more financial support of and increased access to higher education would be enhanced when integrating the summer session as a relevant option in combination with existing degree sequencing processes.

Institutional research plays an important in managing the acceleration graduation policy. IR is the warehouse of relevant information on admissions, tracking student progress, graduation, and academic program descriptors. Institutional policy makers are significant partners with IRers in studying the best fit for an accelerated graduation procedure at the local site

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